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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001494

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, DRL, AND PRM

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TAGS: [PREF PHUM PREL AF UZ TI](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHAN REFUGEES THREATENED (AGAIN) WITH DEPORTATION

REF: A. TASHKENT 459

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 965

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Charge d'Affaires met with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative on August 10 to discuss renewed threats by the Government to deport Afghan refugees from Uzbekistan. Charge shared with Akcura a copy of a diplomatic note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to the Afghan Embassy in Tashkent which accuses the UNDP office in Tashkent of violating its agreement to resettle Afghan refugees in third countries as soon as possible. In the case that the Government expels the refugees, Akcura said that UNDP would be hard pressed to find countries willing to resettle them or temporarily host them in refugee camps. He added that 1,284 Afghan refugees remained in Uzbekistan, and that Sweden and Canada would not resettle any more refugees in 2007. He also noted that some of the Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan appear to be economic refugees rather than genuine political ones. Nevertheless, some of the Afghan refugees are undoubtedly political refugees who could face persecution if returned home, and unfortunately, it appears that the Government may be getting increasingly serious about deporting them. End summary.

EXCHANGE OF DIPLOMATIC NOTES

[1](#)2. (C) On August 10, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative Fikret Akcura (who covers UNHCR matters since the March 2006 expulsion of UNHCR from Uzbekistan) and Charge d'Affaires discussed renewed threats by the Government to deport Afghan refugees from Uzbekistan. Charge shared with Akcura a copy of a diplomatic note dated July 13 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to the Afghan Embassy in Tashkent that was later passed to Embassy Dushanbe by a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative (Note: Embassy Dushanbe provided Post with the note. End Note.) The note accuses the UNDP office in Tashkent of violating its agreement to resettle Afghan refugees in third countries as soon as possible, and as a consequence, threatens to deport them back to Afghanistan

13. (C) The diplomatic note also said that the UNHCR office in Tashkent illegally granted the Afghans "mandate refugee status" before it was closed, and that since taking over UNHCR's responsibilities in Uzbekistan, UNDP continues to illegally issue and renew UNHCR's mandate refugee certificates. Akcura explained that UNDP only issued a new mandate certificate in one incidence, but it continues to renew the certificates every six months or on an annual basis as needed. In an earlier diplomatic note to UNDP on March 6, the MFA declared that the certificates do not provide a legal basis for long-term stay in Uzbekistan, thus reneging on a long-standing "gentlemen's agreement" under which Uzbekistan tolerated the presence of Afghan refugees despite not having ratified international refugee conventions. Also in March, four Afghan refugees were forcibly returned to Afghanistan and there were reports of Afghan refugees being harassed by police (ref A). After UNDP raised the issue with the MFA, reports of harassments against the refugees ceased (ref B). When asked by Charge on August 10, Akcura replied that there have been no new reports of Afghan refugees being harassed.

14. (C) Akcura shared with Charge two related diplomatic notes from the MFA to UNDP dated July 13 and the Afghan Embassy's response to the MFA dated July 30. The note from the MFA reiterates the claim that UNDP is illegally renewing UNHCR mandate certificates, and specifically raises the case of two Afghan refugees, Khedayatullo Makhammad Djan and Said Takhershah Said Shah, whose certificates were renewed in June. It also requests that UNDP cease renewing the certificates and accelerate the resettlement of the Afghan refugees to third countries, lest the Government be forced to deport them. The note from the Afghan Embassy requests the

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assistance of UNDP in preventing the deportation of the refugees back to Afghanistan, claiming the country is already struggling to cope with recent returnees from Pakistan and Iran.

UNDP'S OPTIONS

15. (C) In the case that the Government goes ahead with its threat to expel the Afghans, Akcura said that UNDP has three possible options. First, UNDP can allow the refugees to be deported back to Afghanistan. Second, UNDP could relocate the Afghans to a third country refugee camp. But he said that doing so would violate UNDP principles and it would be difficult to find a host, as none of Uzbekistan's neighbors were interested in accepting the refugees. Third, the refugees could be permanently settled in a third country, but once again, it would be difficult to find countries willing to accept them in time. Akcura expressed interest in trying to convince the Government to grant Uzbek citizenship to Afghan refugees who have married Uzbek citizens. However, he believed that the Government is afraid to demonstrate any leniency towards the refugees, as it may encourage more Afghans to cross the border. Charge observed that although the Government was pressuring UNDP to speed up resettlement, it was not taking the necessary steps on its end to facilitate the process. For example, the MFA was slow in the past to issue visas to DHS interviewers who could determine whether refugees could be resettled in the United States.

16. (C) Charge asked about the fourth option, repatriation, and whether UNDP was still considering implementing an educational campaign with UNHCR to encourage voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan (ref A). Akcura replied that he was told by the Afghan Embassy that the refugees could not be convinced to return to Afghanistan. However, UNDP still plans on approaching UNHCR in Geneva and in Kabul about the program. In addition, Akcura said that UNHCR will raise the Government's threat to deport the refugees with U.N. Under Secretary General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe, who

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will be representing the U.N. General Secretary at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) summit in Bishkek on August 16, and with Tom Koenigs, the Secretary General's Special Representative in Afghanistan, who will be visiting Central Asia in September.

NUMBER OF AFGHAN REFUGEES REMAINING

17. (C) As of July 31, Akcura said that there were 1,284 Afghan refugees remaining in Uzbekistan. Akcura reviewed the United States' resettlement program statistics for 2007 so far: 61 of the refugees were accepted this year, with 119 more waiting for flights, and another 152 undergoing medical examinations. If all of those refugees eventually are resettled in the United States, there will be less than 1,000 Afghan refugees remaining in Uzbekistan. Akcura said that Sweden and Canada have informed UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva that they will not accept any more Afghan refugees in 2007. Charge informed Akcura that no more DHS interviews are planned in Tashkent for the rest of 2007 at this time. Charge also reviewed for Akcura the various categories of Afghan refugees the USG cannot resettle, including those close associates of warlord General Dostom, former "People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan" (PDRA) officials, human rights violators, etc.

POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC REFUGEES?

18. (C) Akcura and Charge also discussed some peculiarities about the Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan. Akcura noted that several of the refugees reported traveling back and forth between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan on business, which is unusual, as refugees are normally afraid to return to their home countries. In addition, several of the refugees hold Afghan passports and renew them at the Afghan Embassy in

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Tashkent, even though refugees are usually reluctant to visit Embassies of their home country. Furthermore, some of the Afghan refugees have come to Uzbekistan recently, despite the fact that unrest in Afghanistan has subsided and refugees based in other countries are starting to return. As a result, Akcura believed that at least some of the Afghans are really economic refugees rather than genuine political ones. In addition, he speculated that the Government was also aware of this, and that may be part of the reason why it is seeking to expel them.

COMMENT

19. (C) The delivery of the two diplomatic notes from the MFA to the Afghan Embassy and UNDP is a bad sign that the Government may be serious about deporting the remaining Afghan refugees. After Akcura reported in May that Afghan refugees were no longer being harassed (ref B), we hoped that the Government would back down on its earlier threat to deport the refugees. On the other hand, by continuing to threaten the remaining refugees with expulsion, the Government may be seeking to simply speed up the resettlement or repatriation process. If the Government moves to deport the refugees before they can be resettled or repatriated, though, UNDP will be hard pressed to find them shelter in a third country. Although some of the Afghans may be economic refugees, undoubtedly some of them are genuine political refugees who may face persecution if they are forcibly returned to their home communities. Some of those, in turn, may have been part of the repressive Soviet puppet "People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan" regime, and therefore are barred from possible resettlement in the United States.

HANSON